Initiatives to improve existing programmes. The new materials can be used in part or in full to improve existing primary programmes. The Basic Competencies at present are the only genuine Afghan set of learning expectations available, and as such they constitute an appropriate standard for learning achievement in all Afghan programmes whether or not they use the Supplementary Materials or the Teachers' Guides.

A box below describes how the Basic Competencies can be used to identify weaknesses in student learning in existing programmes, and how to utilise Supplementary Materials with Teachers' Guides to strengthen these weaknesses. This is a process that needs to be facilitated by programme developers to ensure that it is carried out consistently for all children. Teachers will find it difficult to analyse tests and materials on their own, and in any case they are unlikely to implement remediation using these components unless asked to do so by someone in authority. Later when they have had the experience of connecting competency materials with tests it will become more apparent how the instructional materials can be used to prepare students for testing. One way to encourage teachers to see the connections is for supervisors to hand out practice tests (with clearly marked competencies next to the exercises) before examining students.

A Process for Improving Results in Existing Programmes

The following suggests a step by step process for utilising the new materials to assess learning needs and improve results in existing programmes:

1. **Assess student learning**. Administer competency-based tests at each grade level in math and language. Math tests can be developed by creating test items similar to those found in the Basic Competencies booklets. For language, one or two passages can be selected from the appropriate grade competency booklets. The passages should include the accompanying questions that demonstrate reading, comprehension, writing, and other skills. (Sample tests can be found in the annex)

2. **Analyse the results**. Determine which questions have been answered correctly by 80 percent of the children (similar to the standard set by Afghan developers of the materials) and those items where fewer than 80 percent of children have answered them correctly and therefore need further review. List these weak competencies (refer back to competency booklets).

3. **Strengthen learning**. Identify the lesson-plans in the Supplementary Materials that address the specific competencies where students were weak, and teach them according to the directions in the generic Teacher Guide using the practices found in the student lessons.

4. **Retest student learning.** Ensure that children can now answer the questions correctly in areas where they were weak before. Use review questions in student materials and assessment lessons in the Guides to ensure that children have mastered the competencies. If only a few children are having problems, have them review these lessons for homework and assess their mastery the next day.

There are a number of other ways that the new materials can be incorporated into existing programmes. For example, competency-based tests are often better than "paper credentials" as a way of determining whether teachers meet skill standards for hiring, can teach upper grades requiring more content knowledge, and know specific subject contents. Poor test results should not necessarily eliminate teachers from being hired or from teaching certain subjects, but rather should form the basis for a remedial programme to help them strengthen their capabilities. Basic Competencies can be used as a remedial programme by selectively choosing the practice examples for Competencies that conform with their demonstrated weaknesses.

Competency testing also provides managers with information to make policy decisions about such programme issues as whether formal schooling produces better learning results than home-based schooling, whether existing academic or training criteria for hiring teachers are appropriate, what content to provide in teacher training, and when students have achieved mastery levels that deserve promotion to higher grades or certificates for primary completion. If resources are limited, for example, managers may want to encourage

cost-effective solutions that produce the best learning, assuming that all else is equal. For example, if home schools produce learning results equal to those in formal schools at less cost, then expansion of home schools becomes an appropriate option.

Some General and Specific Uses for the Basic Competencies

- To align donors' contributions to Afghan education
- To provide uniformly high-quality schooling for Afghans
- To align such education components as training, assessment, and instructional materials toward learning
- To define clearly when standards have been met
- To focus teaching on student learning
- To assess and improve the effectiveness of programmes
- To allocate limited resources more cost-effectively
- To pinpoint and strengthen weaknesses in teaching/learning
- To improve teacher capability in subject-content

C. Establishing new programmes

Rationale. Up until now those who have wanted to establish new primary programmes have been faced with a choice--to use a poor quality programme that has been de facto accepted by Afghan authorities (not on the basis of quality but because it has no objectionable content or pictures) and a programme that, although of better quality, has the disadvantages of requiring considerable training before teachers can use its teachers' guide effectively. This among other factors has limited the areas where the better programme can be used and increased its costs. The new materials have been developed under the assumption that by reducing a primary learning programme to its essential quality elements and doing it with self-evident supportive aids for teachers, education services can be delivered at lower cost, thereby freeing resources for a major expansion of opportunities.

Initiatives to expand new programming. To implement an expanded programme requires two major conditions: 1) conduits to deliver education to new areas, and 2) flexible and inexpensive support systems to maintain the programme, including a system for accreditation that is recognised and respected.

1. Expanding education opportunities for Afghan children

The process of expanding the programme requires several steps and a number of considerations. Who are the audiences for the programme? How will it be delivered? What will be delivered? Who will deliver it? Who will maintain it? These questions should be addressed by an inter-agency consultative council with a strong Afghan representation. The discussion below raises some of the issues that need to considered and in some cases makes suggestions about how they might be handled.

Who are the potential audiences for the programme? The expectation in the Strategy is that the programme will fill a niche regardless of future circumstances. It may be adopted in part or in full as an Afghan government programme. It may provide a parallel "private" option. It may be used in non-formal (NFE) or adult education programmes. It may be used in alternative systems such as home-schools, or self-study programmes. It may serve remote and far-flung areas where programmes are hard to mount and maintain.

Since the programme is designed to be useful in all these circumstances, there should be as few restrictions as possible on its use, other than ones related to cost. The authority to credentialise serves as an important means

of controlling outcomes, and anyone of any age should be able to demonstrate mastery and receive appropriate certificates.

How will the programme be delivered? Should the programme be delivered directly to teachers or should there be an intermediary between a central agency and teacher-recipients? Should that facilitating group be an NGO, community group, family or tribal association, or governmental agency? Will it be offered to anyone who applies and can pay for it or, if offered free for a time, will there be a selection process to ensure that the "package" is used as intended and reaches intended audiences?

If agencies are planning to support the costs of the programme temporarily, a screening process may be desirable before providing a package to applicants. Some of the pre-requisites might include:

- a teacher with minimum qualifications based on traditional academic criteria or, preferably, a test of Basic Competencies in relevant grade-level subjects,
- a minimum number of students wishing to study,
- an appropriate venue where classes can be held,
- a plan for how other costs of schooling, including teacher's salary, will be covered

In the Afghan context, many potential teachers do not have conventional degrees and yet may possess the necessary skills to teach at the primary level. Conversely, teachers with degrees do not always have adequate skills to teach higher primary grades. Testing candidates on the Basic Competencies identifies their strengths and weaknesses and makes it possible to give them remedial help if needed.

What will be delivered and who will pay for it? At a minimum the programme package for one class might include children's books (one per child) of the right grade levels and subject matters, and one Teachers' Guide for each grade and subject matter taught. In addition, a programme cannot be fully implemented without writing materials for students--slates, chalk and pencils for younger children, and notebooks for older children. And a teacher is handicapped without a blackboard and chalk.

Will these elements be paid for by assistance agencies, parents or others? Until the programme becomes established, the agencies should probably pay the costs of these items. And they may want to continue to subsidise the programme for poor or otherwise disadvantaged groups. After the programme is established and proves effective, demand may be sufficient to encourage parents and/or communities to support the costs. In many cases now parents buy UNO materials which are available through vendors in the bazaar. Eventually the Afghan Government could take over the costs if normal services are reinstated.

Who will deliver it? Who will maintain it? Expanding the programme requires that facilitating organisations seek out new clients, orient teachers to the package, and monitor results. Existing organisations already involved in or wanting to become involved in service delivery can be given orientation in the effective use of the materials, and implement the programme with new clients in regions where they are active. For others--such as independent teachers, community organisations, and local NGOs--it may be more efficient to work through organisations that assume responsibility for organising delivery, orientation and routine monitoring. Active responsibility for recruiting new clients should lessen over time as the programme becomes known and demand increases, materials become available in the market for sale, and teachers require less support in setting up their own independent classes. This designated organisation however should continue to provide teacher orientation and monitoring for the purpose of providing credit. Ultimately after the emergency period is over these functions should naturally be taken over by an official body such as the Ministry of Education in Kabul.

Save the Children USA's experience in refugee villages has shown that when a programme is newly initiated in an area, it may be necessary to persuade parents to send children and to identify enough teachers and students to establish classes. This can be a time-consuming process in communities that do not have a tradition of education. Fairly soon however teachers and parents begin to demand programmes when they feel their children may be missing an opportunity.

The assistance community has a number of ready-made connections in refugee villages and communities inside Afghanistan. Several of the organisations whose staff members have been involved in the development of the new materials have direct access to the field and potential clients through their existing programmes. There may be other Afghan and international NGOs involved in health, community development and other service sectors who may also act as contact points. ACBAR, the association of NGOs, is a potential conduit for the new programme. Similarly community fora in various cities and other local networks may see as part of their mission support for education services. Students currently studying in refugee schools will ultimately be able to act as teachers when they return to Afghanistan. Regularly broadcast programmes for Afghans are another way that information about the availability of the programme can be spread.

Ultimately after a period of familiarisation, the programme should evolve to one that is based largely on-demand and supported locally, with some subsidisation and active recruitment of children whose poverty or other disadvantage make it difficult for them to participate. This ultimate state is what will make the approach "a principled one" where the programme is open to all, and not just to certain children.

In summary, programme delivery will require:

- notifying (or recruiting) potential clients for the programme through radio broadcasts, a symposium, demonstrations, and/or participating in pilot-testing
- identifying conduits for delivery--existing organisations with the potential to expand their clients, and groups that can support independent clients in far-flung areas
- conducting orientation programmes for implementing organisations and teachers, and providing follow-up monitoring

2. A system of supports to maintain the programme

Rationale: The Ministry of Education in Kabul in effect is no longer providing education services to the country. Up until now the assistance community's efforts to fill this gap have been piecemeal and limited--only providing education services to small groups of children in limited areas, and in many cases providing services of questionable quality. At the same time assistance funds are limited and not sufficient for a full-scale assault on this problem using traditional methods. Up until now the educational tools at the disposal of the assistance agencies have also been inadequate. Now the tools are available and only require locating in a support structure to significantly improve both the quality and quantity of primary opportunities.

Initiative: Over the next few years the new programme intends to provide a full scale education programme for Afghanistan at modest cost---essentially, with support only for those elements required to cost-effectively maintain the programme. Inexpensive student books and teachers' salaries would be paid for by communities and/or parents (or possibly the government) and these groups would also be responsible for providing a location for classes. Books would be sold through private vendors, giving them a margin of profit and covering the basic costs of production. If necessary the programme could even be run by a knowledgeable teacher with nothing more than the teachers' guide plus one set of the Supplementary Materials or a set of the Basic Competencies.

The assistance community would support an organisation (preferably a local Afghan NGO) to provide teacher orientation and regular monitoring as described above. A committee representing various organisations of the assistance community would make policy and determine procedures for delivering the education programme. They would oversee the contracting and work of the support NGO for defined periods. They would set up accrediting exams for teachers (if communities/parents want this service), they would set standards for awarding credentials, and would validate exam results. They would also "reflect" on student learning results and initiate remedial programmes as needed---teacher strengthening, and/or extra support materials for students. They would look into ways of providing education services for children who for some reason are unable to take advantage of existing programmes.

In summary, a programme over-sight committee would:

- determine policy and the needs of the programme
- contract an NGO to provide orientation and monitoring follow-up (or alternatively to provide training for groups who want to do these activities on their own)
- determine standards for and provide credentialising services for teachers and students, and assign independent assessment functions to a respected group
- reflect on results and see that remedial activities are undertaken by appropriate groups.

As noted above, these functions are normally carried out by governments, and so are the ones that would be turned over to an official body such as the Ministry of Education in Kabul as soon as feasible. In the interim the over-sight committee will need to ensure that these functions are carried out by reliable agencies.

D. Continued capacity building

Rationale: At present local organisations and the assistance community require continued capacity building to support an effective programme of education for Afghans. The greatest needs lie in understanding the technical requirements of an education system enough to make sound judgements about implementation, in the capability to co-ordinate initiatives and find financial support for the programme, and in communicating the intentions and results of the initiative to appropriate audiences. Most of this capacity can be developed on the job by sharing the experiences of implementation and by consulting experts for specific technical tasks.

1. Developing technical capacities

There are several technical capacities required to develop and maintain an effective education programme. These include the technical capacity to develop instructional components, to structure implementation to fit the needs of a variety of audiences, to be able to monitor and reflect on results, and then react, and finally to design the institutional arrangements that maintain the programme. Afghan developers of the materials now are better able to systematically develop education objectives, to prepare materials to address them, and to ensure that they are in an easy-to-use form that suits the conditions of Afghanistan. They understand the uses of the BCL package, but, although they represent a range of organisations, many may not be in positions to set policies or direct the agendas of their institutions. Also since they have focused narrowly on instructional components, they have not been involved in designing systems for implementing and maintaining the programme.

These critical systems are often neglected in existing programmes because of lack of technical knowledge. In particular, agencies need to understand the consequences of such activities as training and supervision since these are the important elements at their disposal to improve learning results. The basis for this understanding is careful monitoring of programme impact. While most agencies monitor results, most also stop at data collection and neglect the purpose of monitoring which is to remediate and improve. This process requires knowing what kinds of data to collect, becoming sensitive to what the data reflect, and then working out appropriate ways to improve on results. Programmes cannot be maintained effectively without the institutional capacity to react appropriately to field data.

Actions:

- Participating agencies should continue to send representatives to workshops where key components of the new programme are developed, in order to take advantage of technical training opportunities and to have a staff member who understands the components thoroughly.
- Initiators of the activities should convene meetings of representatives of participating agencies to consult on designs for pilot-testing, for implementation systems and for the routines that maintain the programme.
- Initiators need to create accountability mechanisms that require data to be analysed and appropriate actions to be taken--such as calling routine meetings to reflect on results, requiring responsive action plans, forming over-sight bodies, preparing analytical reports.

- Initiators need to establish remedial programmes and options to address common weaknesses in the system and make them easily available to participating organisations as tools for improvement
- Initiators need to create follow-up mechanisms--data collections, routine reports--to ensure that improvement takes place

2. Sharing experience and co-ordinating efforts

Before the "common programming" approach was established, there was limited sharing of information or co-ordination of effort between agencies involved in education delivery, and consequently there was duplication of effort and little chance to learn from the experiences of those implementing similar programmes. The 1998 Strategy has brought together a number of agencies to implement the core programme. They have shared information on resources and have participated in joint workshops. The programme also works well with certain kinds of individualised efforts. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), for example, is focusing its new instructional materials and assessment standards on the BCLs. SCA's roughly 600 schools exist in a more easily controlled environment where---different from the more uncertain environments of most Afghan schools---training and supervision can be provided on a routine basis. The experiences of SCA will be important to share with other agencies working to expand opportunities in other areas.

It is important in a context where the assistance community is forced to act in place of a functioning government to co-ordinate efforts under the leadership of a neutral body. UNICEF and Save the Children USA have been willing to provide this central leadership up until now. It is important that a neutral body, such as the Education Working Group, continues to provide leadership, even while various organisations make use of programme components in their own ways. The Strategy is a process requiring step by step activities to achieve its goals, and therefore needs a co-ordinating leadership to ensure that each piece falls into place as intended.

Actions:

- Continue to provide a co-ordinating leadership for the elements of the programme through a neutral body, such as the Education Working Group, if agreed upon by the major participants
- Continue consultative meetings, seminars and symposia to exchange ideas and products, and to co-ordinate activities of major participants
- Provide support as needed for groups like SCA whose goals are the same but who may be taking a different route to achieve them

3. Communicating effectively to interested parties

The Strategy needs to be communicated more effectively both to participating agencies and potentially interested supporters and funders. A systematic approach like the one called for in the Strategy takes time before it can be fully implemented, and therefore it requires forbearance on the part of those who want instant solutions. They have to be convinced that the time it takes to build a solid programme will be worth it in the end. Another danger is that initiatives may be mounted that contradict the premises of the programme and absorb money and personnel that could advance the current efforts more quickly. Afghanistan is a focus of international attention at the moment and if organisations feel the needs of the Afghan people are not being addressed quickly enough they may launch poor quality initiatives that do not meet the long-term needs of Afghans. Current education services for Afghans are an example of where an "emergency" situation has resulted in sub-standard solutions.

The core components of the new programme are far enough in development to communicate them to interested parties. Some components like the Basic Competencies are ready for immediate use. Others like the Supplementary Materials and Teachers' Guides will soon be ready for piloting. If they produce the expected student learning results with minimum support costs and efforts, they may well become a cost-effective model for EFA in the rest of the world. Effective communication will require knowing who the audiences are and tailoring messages to their interests.

Actions:

- Prepare information materials in various forms for anticipated audiences
- Develop a distribution list for informational materials
- Hold short (one-day or half-day) meetings in Peshawar, Islamabad, Washington, and New York to describe the programme to interested parties
- Make available knowledgeable people who can describe the programme in relevant international and local meetings and conferences

E. Additional material and programme development

Rationale: The Programme up until now has concentrated on language development and math competencies under the assumption that these are the fundamental building blocks of learning. By Grade Four if these materials are used properly, children should be able to read textbooks with comprehension and as a consequence they will require less assistance from a teacher. This becomes useful in the upper primary grades because minimally-qualified teachers often have difficulty teaching subjects at these levels, and sometimes children in multi-grade classes have to leave school by Grade Four because the expanded subject matter takes too much of a teachers' time with other grades to attend to. Many Afghan girls also drop out around Grade Three for traditional reasons, and more recently, because of restrictions on girls' participation. In these environments subject materials that are more explicitly self-instructional might make it easier for children to complete primary schooling either in class or at home. It would also free education programmes from their current dependence upon finding highly qualified teachers who can teach higher grades.

Most existing programmes are using UNO materials from grade four through six for subjects not covered by core course materials (many use them for all grades and subjects). This means the new BCL programme will be forced to use UNO materials at higher grades or not teach these important subjects. Most educators agree UNO materials are out-of-date and should be replaced. They present subject matters poorly and have significant gaps in coverage. Their formats encourage a rote style learning that is contradictory to the styles modelled in the BCL materials. Consequently additional materials are needed to round out the core BCL programme, and these materials need to be explicitly self-instructional in the higher grades of primary.

Finally, many of the individuals who will serve as teachers inside Afghanistan will be minimally qualified. They will need programmes to upgrade their skills and subject knowledge. Self-instructional materials in core and other subjects would improve their capabilities.

Initiatives: Several issues above can be addressed at the same time. With careful design, materials can at the same time "enrich" and broaden the subject matter of primary education, and be designed for self-instructional use by teachers and students alike. Both would need recognition for their mastery of the new competencies, students for having passed promotion or completion requirements, and teachers for upgrading their skills.

Enrichment content to a certain extent will already be embedded in new Supplementary Language Materials. Topics include social studies, science, geography, health, and other "life skills" subjects. The purpose of including them in these materials however is to address language competencies---not as major subjects of the primary curriculum. Therefore, the first need (after installing the core programme) is to "enrich" the new programme with materials to replace or supplement the UNO books. This initiative can be undertaken in much the same way that core materials were developed: by setting objectives, developing a scope and sequence framework, and writing materials to address specific objectives at a level appropriate to children in each grade level.

The format for these materials (in science and health, social studies, geography, and possibly others) needs to be considered carefully in order to address issues of cost, training, credentialising, and self-instruction for teachers and students. The following are options that might be used:

Option 1 Develop enrichment materials in textbook style with teachers' guides in the same format as BCL Supplementary Materials. Each student would have books on the individual subject topics arranged in a way that encouraged self-instruction in- or outside of school. The disadvantage of this option would be the higher cost to school, donors or parents.

Option 2 Develop the enrichment materials in SRA sets of approximately 100 cards per subject with reading passages and comprehension questions/answers and teacher instructions in a simple accompanying guide. These boxed sets of materials on various subjects would be used in classrooms by students and/or teachers working their way individually through the passages. Overall the cost would be less to whoever pays for the finished product, and they could be reused from year to year. The disadvantage is that they would be difficult to use in self-instruction for children who no longer attend school.

Actions:

- Prepare instructional materials to replace or supplement UNO materials for subjects that round out the primary curriculum.
- Ensure that all materials from Grade Four on are suitable for self-instruction for children who must remain at home, for multi-graded classes, and/or teachers who have difficulty with the subject matters. If necessary develop simple booklets that indicate how other existing materials may also be used in self-instruction. Provide an opportunity for children to receive credit for mastery of grade levels.
- Develop "degree" programmes to upgrade teacher skills based on the competencies. These can be simple: teacher studies the Basic Competencies and receives specific degree certificates for the subjects and levels in which mastery is demonstrated. This programme can be extended to any new subjects covered.

III Summary and conclusions

The Strategy for Afghan Education formulated in July 1998 was designed to meet the requirements of "common programming," "a principled approach" and "sound investment" no matter what conditions prevail in Afghanistan. It tackled the three technical needs apparent at the time: for expanding **access** to education opportunities, improving the **quality** of Afghan primary programmes, and increasing local **capacity** to develop and maintain a cost-effective education programme. The core initiative was the development and delivery of a simple, **transportable quality programme** for primary education, requiring minimal support in the difficult conditions prevailing in Afghanistan.

In the two years since the Strategy was published, progress has been made on all these fronts. The assistance community co-ordinated efforts to develop the main components for a "transportable programme"--including Basic Competencies that set the focus and will provide the academic standards for math and language, and Supplementary Materials and Teachers' Guides that provide the means to achieve learning standards. By March 2001 these elements will be completed and ready for pilot testing before they are finalised and disseminated widely. Meanwhile elements of the programme will be incorporated into many already existing programmes to assess student learning, provide subject training for teachers and assess programme weaknesses for remediation. In the future educators will also improve primary programmes by expanding subject matter content, developing explicitly self-instructional materials, and recognising teachers who up-grade their skills.

Encouraging the use in existing programmes of BCL and preparing for the expansion of the primary programmes to all Afghan children who need schooling should be the two main foci of activities over the next several years. The priority aim will be to respond to and encourage dei. and from responsible groups and individuals who can facilitate the use of such a self-evident programme where it is needed. The aim is also to increase further local capacity to implement and achieve the objectives of the Strategy.

Annex 1

Suggested Implementation Strategy

Year-by-Year Implementation Activities

2000	
September	Prepare general information materials in various forms for anticipated audiences: to communicate to funders, implementers and planners Develop a distribution list for written materials
October	Hold short (one-day or half-day) meetings in Peshawar, Islamabad, Washington, and New York of interested parties to describe the programme Make knowledgeable people available who can describe the programme in relevant international and local meetings and conferences; seek out venues (the aim being to raise support and encourage a co-ordinated effort)
November	Develop the Supplementary Language Materials and Guides
December	Prepare early lessons of language materials in draft for pilot testing Convene consultative group to plan pilot-testing, determine samples Complete pilot-testing design, experimental questions Ready support systems for pilot-testing Prepare assessment and interview instruments Convene a seminar of relevant organisations to report progress on the BCL programme and its anticipated time table; demonstrate how its components can be used immediately in existing programmes to improve the quality of learning and of teacher training; offer an analysis of individual programmes to demonstrate how BCL can be used.
2001	
January	(beginning of school year for one group of schools) Orient facilitators to new programme Facilitators orient Phase 1 teachers to programme Begin pilot testing of math and draft language materials in first set of schools
February	Test children on early competencies Reflect on data Decide on and take remedial actions Convene consultative group to discuss Phase 2
March	(beginning of school year for second group of schools) Orient Phase 2 facilitators to new programme Facilitators orient Phase 2 teachers to programme Begin pilot testing math and completed language materials in second set of schools, modifying support systems and procedures as needed based on experiences in Phase 1

I Background

The purpose of this paper is to refine the long-term objectives of a Strategy for Afghan Education and, based on activities already implemented, to suggest practical steps for the next few years to achieve its objectives.

In July 1998 a Strategy for Afghan Education was formulated at the request of the assistance community. Because of the unstable political conditions at the time, the community asked that the Strategy meet three conditions: 1) that it permit common programming of education initiatives across agencies, 2) that it take a principled approach by offering benefits equitably and 3) that funding invested in the programme have potential for long term benefit to the Afghan people. The watchwords were "common programming," "a principled approach" and "sound investment."

After intensive consultations with members of international and Afghan organisations and visits to existing programmes, three technical needs became apparent in the education sector. These needs were major expansion in **access** to education opportunities, improvements in the **quality** of programmes offered to Afghans, and increased local **capacity** to develop and maintain cost-effective education programmes under conditions that exist inside Afghanistan.

The core initiative was the development and delivery of a simple, **transportable quality programme** for primary education, requiring minimal support in the field. To do this the Strategy called for development of a set of agreed-upon basic competencies for the primary grades. These competencies were necessary to focus instructional components and provide a uniform standard against which the learning results of a dispersed student population could be measured. At the time no official set of education goals and objectives could be found to give authority to an Afghan programme for primary education.

Now, two years later (July 2000), steps have been taken or are underway to implement the main elements of the Strategy. A group of respected Afghan educators representing a number of organisations and several individual Afghan educators have developed basic competencies for the primary grades in the core subjects of mathematics and language (Pashto and Dari). While not an official curriculum it comes as close as possible to representing Afghan wishes under present circumstances. At the same time the competencies, which were developed with the facilitation of a curriculum specialist, represent an international standard of quality.

In the spring of 2000, many of the same Afghan educators developed a set of instructional materials to address each of the math competencies identified earlier, and, in Fall 2000, they will prepare similar sets of language materials to address competencies in Pashto and Dari. It was decided to develop "supplementary materials" rather than formal textbooks for several reasons. Such materials can be used more flexibly---to fill gaps in existing programmes or to use as stand-alone materials for the primary grades. There is usually less resistance to them and the Afghan educators involved in their development believe they will prove useful even alongside "authorised" materials. With broad use and demonstrated effectiveness, they are expected to gain widespread acceptance in the Afghan community. The case has also been argued that despite the sensitivities surrounding curricula and textbooks, it is important to support Afghan efforts to develop better education models for the future. Finally in the context of Afghan education, it is only possible to achieve quality improvements on a large scale and cost-effectively through better instructional materials.

To ensure effective use of the new Supplementary Materials, the Afghan developers prepared a self-evident generic teachers' guide with instructions for teaching the lessons. The consistently-formatted "lesson plans" model good teaching practice, provide a variety of ways to practice new skills, and describe new concepts in ways easily understood by students and teachers. These student and teacher materials form the core of the "transportable programme package" called for in the Strategy. The package requires little field support other than basic teacher orientation to the lesson-plan format in the guide, and periodic assessments of student performance by an independent evaluator to certify grade level or primary completion. As conditions ease inside Afghanistan other types of support can be added to upgrade teachers' capacities and provide enrichment for the basic programme.

April	Test children on competencies in both groups of schools Reflect on data Decide on and take remedial actions
May	Test children on competencies in both groups of schools Reflect on data Decide on and take remedial actions Convene workshop to prepare materials for additional subject matters in self-instructional format
June-July	Finalise new subject matter materials
June-October	Test children on competencies in both groups of schools Reflect on data Decide on and take remedial actions
November	Finalise core materials and support systems and continue to test Phase 1 and 2 children regularly
December	Convene consultative group to discuss plans for expansion Prepare for expanding the programme by identifying potential delivery conduits: organisations that work on education regionally or locally and those whose scope might be expanded to include facilitation of education services Identify an NGO or other organisation that can take responsibility for providing the contact point for interested groups and individuals, and who can distribute materials, orient teachers and provide routine assessment Use media, send circulars, visit groups who may be interested in programme and invite them to the seminar below Convene a seminar/symposium to demonstrate the programme
2002 **January**	Orient facilitators to new programme Facilitators orient new teachers to programme Begin use of math and language materials in expanded set of schools Also begin use of additional subject matter materials (these will benefit from previous piloting and be based on the same formats so will be monitored but not formally piloted)

At appropriate intervals there should be information-sharing conferences, issues-oriented symposia, consultative meetings with key members of the assistance community etc, both for reasons of sharing experiences and building capacity to maintain the programme.

ANNEX 2

SAMPLE TESTS

Language Tests

Pick one reading passage from each of the Grade Two and Grade Three Basic Competencies Booklets. Passages should have attached questions that ask about as many of the following as possible:

- main idea
- some vocabulary
- some literal questions
- some interpretative questions
- grammatical structures
- writing practice

Note: The reading passage for Grade Two can be used with beginning Grade Three students, and the reading passage for Grade Three with children part way through or near the end of Grade Three.

Sample Grade Two Math Test

(based on Basic Competencies Booklets)

1	From Page 1, Math Class II, the abacus problem with answer "025"
2	Write the number: 6 hundreds 8 tens 4 ones
3	Circle the larger number in each pair: 56 65 92 29 23 22
4	Write the number that comes between: 277, ___, 279
5	Add: 27 + 15
6	Add: 468 + 127
7	Subtract: 497 - 145
8	Subtract: 342 - 223
9	There were 242 apples on a tree. 17 apples fell off. How many apples are still on the tree? ________
10	There are 256 books on one shelf and 327 books on the other shelf. How many books are there on both shelves? ____________
11	(Question 21 on page 10, Math Class II) Circle the fraction of the shaded part: Picture 1: 2/4, 1/4, 3/3 Picture 2: 1/2, 1/3, 2/3
12	Hameed has 50 Afs + 20 Afs + 10 Afs = ______ Afs Hameed brought grapes for 15 Afs and apples for 76 Afs. How many Afs did Hameed pay? ____ How many Afs remain? _____
13	Draw a circle: ____, Draw a triangle: ____, Draw a square: ____, Draw a rectangle ____

Sample Grade Three Math Test:

1	Fill in the missing numbers in the blanks: 506, ___, ___, 509, ___, ___, ___, 513,
2	Add: 6000 + 300 + 10 = _____
3	Add: 824 + 139
4	Add: 8232 + 1199
5	Subtract: 8425 - 6243
6	Subtract: 5805 - 4232
7	Multiply: 21,182 x 3
8	Multiply: 11,586 x 4
9	Multiply: 8210 x 5
10	One radio costs 3812 Afs. How much will 2 radios cost?
11	(For format see p. 7, Math Class III) 50 divided by 5 = ____ 35 divided by 5 = ____ 90 divided by 9 = ____ 63 divided by 9 = ____ 35 divided by 7 = ____ 56 divided by 7 = ____
12	Write the fraction of the shaded part: (Use two examples from #23, p.9, Math Class III)
13	Which is the larger fraction of this pair: (Use two examples from #25, p.9, Math Class III)
14	Solve the problems: 1/4 + 1/4 = ___, and 1/3 + 2/3 =
15	Solve the problems: 3/6 - 2/6 = ___, and 3/4 - 1/4 =
16	(For test, draw rectangle with measures) What is the perimeter of a rectangle with sides that are 6m and 3m?
17	One gram of beads cost 24 Afs. What is the cost of 8 grams?
18	Fatah's father had 66000 Afs. He bought oil and flour for 35000. How many Afs does he have now?
19	Zarlasht had 5000 Afs. Her father gave her 500 Afs for the Eid. How many Afs does she have now?
20	Sharif had 81 Afs. He divided it among his three sisters. How much did each sister get?

LIST OF ACRONYMS

The acronyms in this list are from the text of the report

ACBAR	Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief
BCL	Basic Competencies of Learning
EFA	Education for All
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SC-US	Save the Children USA
SM	Supplementary Materials
SRA	Science Research Association
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNO	University of Nebraska at Omaha

During these two years, progress has also been made in establishing institutional support for the Afghan programme. Aims of the Strategy have been incorporated into the planning documents of major agencies, and financial support has been raised for several of the on-going activities. Various assistance groups have provided in-kind organisational support and staff time to materials development activities, and a collaborative relationship has been developed through inter-agency meetings to plan activities and reflect on the progress of implementation. In spring 2000, a symposium was held under the auspices of ACBAR (the main association of NGOs) with speakers describing the importance of instructional materials, and exhibits showing locally available resources for use in education programmes. This occasion provided representatives of the assistance community and others interested in Afghan education with an opportunity for exchange of ideas and products.

The Strategy has evolved since its formulation in 1998. At that time it appeared important to propose individual initiatives that, although contributing to a common programme, could be implemented independently by the various assistance agencies. Since then many agencies have demonstrated their willingness, in collaboration with UNICEF and Save the Children USA, to co-ordinate efforts in developing the core components of the Strategy. Also in 1998, the focus concentrated on programmes suitable for primary education inside Afghanistan where the lack of opportunities had reached crisis proportion. Repatriation however has not moved at the pace expected, and consequently it seems important now to expand and improve the quality of opportunities being provided to refugee children as well. These same children may ultimately teach schools inside Afghanistan and therefore ensuring that they obtain the skills they need to become teachers is one way of preparing for the widespread dissemination of education programmes inside Afghanistan. The rationale for the participation of many of the agencies is therefore concern with the quality of their already existing programmes.

By the end of 2000 the components of the transportable programme will be complete. The present document looks at the next steps in implementing the Strategy for Afghan Education.

II Next Steps in Implementation

The three technical needs for Afghan Education identified in 1998---expanding access, improving quality, and strengthening capacity---continue to serve as the objectives in implementing the Strategy for Afghan Education.

Access and quality are related in this programme. Access, it is assumed, can be expanded broadly by reducing education components to the minimum needed for quality learning, and providing them in an easily-delivered "package" requiring little field support. The Basic Competencies of Learning (BCL) and the Supplementary Materials constitute the central core of this package. Although the two are linked, they have different roles to play in providing effective education. The Basic Competencies constitute a set of Afghan expectations for learning, and as such they can be used in a variety of ways (described below). The Supplementary Materials are a means to achieve the Competencies. Before disseminating them broadly, they need testing to confirm that they achieve the expected results.

Five activities are central to the future implementation of the Strategy. These activities are:

- **finalising the "transportable" programme:** preparing final programme packages through testing the effectiveness of the Supplementary Materials and Teachers' Guides in the field, determining the minimal support structures they will need, and preparing instruments to assess their impact.
- **incorporating the package into ongoing programmes:** identifying appropriate uses for the BCL and Supplementary Materials in existing programmes, and developing the means by which they can be effectively incorporated
- **establishing new programmes**: identifying delivery conduits to disseminate the programme to Afghans inside Afghanistan and elsewhere and developing the institutional support systems to maintain the programme.
- **increasing capacity**: continuing to build the capacity of local organisations and the assistance community to co-ordinate activities in advocating for and supporting a programme of education for Afghans.
- **developing additional materials and programmes**: preparing additional materials/programmes to enrich the core programme, address the special conditions of Afghan education, and strengthen other aspects of the programme such as teacher capability.

Some of these activities are time bound--that is they should precede or succeed other activities for maximum effect. Others can be implemented simultaneously as long as the technical support and funding are available. A suggested timetable is appended to this paper.

A Finalising the programme package

Rationale: The Supplementary Materials are intended for the use of teachers in helping students achieve the instructional competencies. As such they should be easy-to-use, self-evident to avoid unnecessary and costly support, and produce defined learning results if used as intended. They should prove effective in the range of contexts where they will be used, and with a variety of teachers and students. Any person who is fully literate in Pashto or Dari should be able to use the materials, regardless of his or her academic qualifications or training. These assumptions need to be confirmed before disseminating the programme widely. Time spent in testing these assumptions reduces the chance of installing an ineffective programme that in the long-term does not benefit Afghan children.

Even though the materials are designed to stand-alone if necessary they will be more effective with modest support. Systems need to be put in place to deliver the materials to teachers, to orient teachers to their use, and to assess when students have mastered competencies sufficiently to certify results. These minimal systems also need to be developed and tested to ensure they produce the intended results.

Initiatives to finalise the programme. Finalising the programme requires three main activities:

- pilot-testing materials and their support systems under conditions similar to those where they will be used,
- finalising materials and support systems based on field information,
- producing the materials in inexpensive versions.

These activities are described below.

1. Pilot-testing materials and their support systems in a range of Afghan conditions

Purposes of pilot testing. There are four purposes for the pilot-testing:

- to determine the effectiveness of the instructional programme (the materials, their essential supports, and teacher use of them) in Afghan schooling contexts,
- to determine the minimum support system required to produce effective learning,
- to introduce the materials to a broad audience of potential users and involve them in testing the effectiveness of the programme,
- to develop staff capacities to deliver programmes, monitor impact and reflect on results.

The materials contain elements that have already proven successful in producing learning results in similar environments[1] -- these include systematic scope and sequencing techniques, "effective teaching practices," and consistently formatted teacher supports. The aim of the pilot-testing is to ensure that these already-proven elements also work in the variety of Afghan contexts where the materials will be used.

This purpose takes priority in the design of the study. The specific research questions therefore are:

- Do the materials with their supports produce expected learning results in Afghan schooling contexts?
- What is the minimum support---training, supervision, and assessment---required to produce acceptable results?
- What are other factors in the environment that may be producing variations in student learning (such as teacher qualifications or subject knowledge, class size, etc)

Preparing supports. To simulate real-life use of the materials, pilot-testing requires that the same supports be employed that will ultimately be used in full-scale implementation. The Strategy calls for these supports to be minimal for reasons of cost and convenience. Therefore it is important to determine what essential minimal elements are needed to produce results. A minimal support system might consist of:

- procedures for selecting and contacting teachers,
- a short orientation programme for teachers, and
- a system for assessing results

There should be prior understanding of which variables in the support system will be tested. The trials might, for example, look at whether students learn better when teachers have been given a simple orientation rather than no orientation at all, or whether the length of the orientation (long or short) or the content of the orientation (learning the lesson format alone versus learning the format plus some training in the subject matter) is important. Data from the trials should make it possible to determine which support procedures are most cost-effective.

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[1]A BRIDGES study, **Teaching Practices Associated with Increased Student Achievement in Pakistan**, (BRIDGES Research Report Series No. 8, March 1991) identified systematic teaching/learning practices that produced higher student learning. This approach was incorporated into Pakistani textbooks and teachers' guides and raised student achievement in over 700 experimental sites.

The trial experience should also informally answer such questions as who can best train the teachers, how the trainers will be trained, and who should conduct assessments and reflect on their results. Since "continuous" monitoring is called for in the programme, these and other support elements can be modified and changed if they prove ineffective.

The Afghan programme developers who know best what is required to support their materials should be involved in the design of the support elements. At the same time supports should be simple: action lists, descriptions of how activities might be implemented, and/or simple assessment, orientation, and interview forms. Each should be tied directly to the purposes they are intended to accomplish so as not to collect unnecessary information and waste time and resources. Quality of learning is not something that will be accomplished through one set of procedures or materials. It is a continuous process of improvement that at any one time should rely on the best information available.

A Suggested Orientation Programme for Teachers

Main ideas/skills needed by teachers to use materials effectively

1. Understanding the aims and uses of the materials. A trainer should introduce the programme to teachers with a brief description of the components in the instructional package. There are three kinds of materials: the Basic Competencies, the Supplementary Materials, and the Teachers' Guide to the Materials.

The **Basic Competencies of Learning (BCL)** indicate what children need to learn in math and language in Grades 1 through 6. Teachers can refer to them to know what to teach, to find practice exercises, to improve their own understanding of concepts, and to use as a source of test items for assessing whether children have mastered the competencies.

The **Supplementary Materials (SM)** are essentially textbooks for children. They break the Competencies into easily taught concepts and skills. When used according to directions in the Teachers' Guide they will help children master the Competencies required at their grade levels. From Grade Two and above the student books start with a thorough review of the previous grade's work to prepare for the next set of work.

The **Teachers' Guide (TG)** accompanies the Supplementary Materials. It presents systematic teaching steps for using the SM to ensure desired student learning results. These steps, which have been shown in similar contexts to produce higher student learning results, take the form of a generic lesson plan. Lessons have a consistent format to make them easier for teachers to use.

2. Understanding the generic lesson plan in the Teachers' Guide. A trainer should describe (and perhaps model) the steps of the lesson plan one by one. Then each teacher should choose a lesson from the Supplementary Materials and role-play the way he or she would teach the steps, following the instructions in the lesson-plan of the Guide. The teachers should be told that every lesson will follow the same steps, and that once the format is understood, teaching will become easier. Trainers should also explain how the review lessons should be conducted, making special reference to the fact that students can use the answer keys in their books to check their work. Finally, the trainer should explain the importance of assessing student mastery of concepts before students move to the next unit of work.

3. Suggesting effective ways to manage classes. Trainers should suggest to teachers that more effective learning is likely to occur if they vary the instructional arrangements in classes. For example, teachers may want to conduct whole-class learning to explain a new concept and to guide early practice of new concepts. At other times children should work independently on practice exercises or form pairs or groups to teach one another the new skills. Teachers need to make sure that all children in the class can see visual displays clearly, are called upon for practice, and are given sufficient chances to learn. Trainers should make special note of how teachers should address multi-age, differing ability, and multi-grade classes by using the materials in self-instruction and peer-teaching arrangements.

4. Ensuring learning. Teachers need to know that an independent supervisor will come periodically to see if children are mastering the skills called for in the Competencies. They should be assured that if they use the materials as directed, the students will be able to successfully demonstrate their mastery of the Competencies.

As noted a minimal support system is likely to consist of: procedures for selecting and contacting teachers, a short orientation programme for teachers, and a system for assessing results. The section below suggests how these supports might be designed.

Procedures for contacting and selecting teachers. The procedures for identifying teachers will vary depending on the institutions and personnel taking part in the trials and their methods of communicating with teachers. For purposes of the pilot testing it is best to show flexibility in these procedures since they will represent real-life variety in implementation. The procedures however should be documented to provide examples of approaches used to establish programmes.

An orientation programme for teachers. Teacher orientation should be as simple as possible. The Strategy expects materials to bear the large share of the instructional burden. Teachers need only use the materials and guides correctly to produce expected learning results. The programme developers should agree upon the essential information needed by teachers to use the materials effectively. Altogether it should be possible to communicate these points to teachers in an orientation lasting a day or less. (See box for a set of sample points) At the end of the orientation the teacher should receive a brief paper summarising the main points of the orientation for reference.

For experimental purposes some groups of teachers may be given this basic orientation, some might be given no orientation, and some might be given a longer orientation with an enhancement like review of basic concepts for the grade level being taught. Student performance results will determine the added value, if any, of each of these orientation inputs.

Assessment instruments for pilot testing. The final main support for the pilot testing phase should be a set of procedures and instruments for assessing the learning results of students. The tests, covering grade level skills in the Basic Competencies, will reveal whether students are mastering the expected learning---and, in the pilot phase, whether the materials and support systems are producing expected results. They will also indicate where the strengths and weaknesses of the programme lie and where remedial efforts may be necessary.

During pilot testing several variations of testing might be tried: one where teachers are given sample tests and are allowed to prepare their students for the assessment exam, and another where tests are simply given by the external evaluator. The purpose is to see if practice tests encourage teachers to focus instruction on specific competencies, thus helping students to develop better skills.

Again, where possible, Afghan educators should prepare tests based on the competencies they developed. The tests will consist of items for the grade level being examined, and these developers should set the standards for correct answers that would satisfy them the programme has worked. Preparing assessment instruments is a capacity building exercise that develops skills needed to monitor and maintain the programme. Where possible those who do this exercise should be the ones who will do this task in their own organisations on a long-term basis.

Design issues. The design of the pilot-testing should be no more complicated than needed to answer the questions posed by the research. Two features should be especially kept in mind. The purpose of the testing is not to compare one set of instructional materials (such as UNO) against another but rather to test the new materials against criteria set by the Basic Competencies. The second point is that Supplementary Materials, their accompanying guides, and supports are the Programme elements being tested. The Basic Competencies constitute the aims of the Programme and as such do not require testing. Several other design considerations can be found in the accompanying box.

Design Considerations for Pilot-Testing

Design considerations in the pilot-testing include: samples, phasing, duration, grade level, subject matter, and testing. Below are some of the issues that will arise.

Sample: The aims of pilot-testing should be reflected in sample selection. There are three kinds of aims that will affect sample selection: to test the effectiveness of materials, to acquaint relevant groups with the new materials and to develop the skills of personnel to sustain the programme. Consequently the sample should consist of as large a representation of potential users as can be cost-effectively accommodated. The class is the unit of analysis; and participating organisations should be allowed to involve as few or as many classes as they can comfortably accommodate.

Since participation is voluntary, the sample will necessarily be one of "convenience"---that is, those wishing to participate will constitute the pool of sample classes. It is hoped that this sample will reflect a variety of geographical locations, types of organisation, teacher qualifications, etc. If not, additional groups may also be encouraged to participate. In the initial pilot-testing, priority should be given to organisations with capacity to conduct the teacher orientation and assessment required to support the programme. An assumption of the design is that most programmes will be delivered with initial help from an organisation whether it be international, regional, or local.

Cost and effort will ultimately decide the size of the sample. However, the following may be useful characteristics to consider in determining the composition of the final sample (not all may be available or desirable and there may be other important ones):

- Organisations working inside and outside Afghanistan
- Organisations with experience in supporting schools and those with little or no experience
- Formal programmes and home-based programmes
- Girls', boys' and mixed schools
- Classes with experienced and inexperienced teachers
- Teachers with varied qualifications (academic/training)
- Single and multi-grade classes
- Varying grade levels

Phasing: If time is available, testing should occur in two phases, first on a small scale under fairly controlled and favourable conditions before expanding further. The aim would be to iron out difficulties in procedure before they can interfere with results. During the second phase the testing can concentrate on the major questions of the study. Of importance in considering a two-phased approach would be whether the assistance community is willing to wait the additional time required for two phases (possibly an extra half-year or more) before implementing the final programme. The time-table may possibly be accelerated by taking advantage of winter and summer session classes so phases overlap, or of starting with math materials instead of waiting until language materials are ready. An alternative may be to introduce the programme to sites in quick succession and adjust procedures as it becomes necessary. This is not a violation in rigour as long as the procedures are documented and every effort is made to keep them simple. The capacity of the materials to produce results in a variety of contexts with minimum support is what is being tested.

Duration: At a minimum the pilot-testing should cover a semester's work, with students tested on competencies they would be expected to learn during that time. If time permits, an additional semester should be added for two reasons: it takes time to become familiar with any new programme and therefore early results may not demonstrate the materials' true potential, and it gives time to test whether remedial actions such as re-orientation of teachers who are having difficulty are enough to put the programme on track.

Grade levels and subject matters. Ideally the materials should be introduced at Grade One since the approach builds skills systematically from that grade onward. However, the programme can also be tested with children who have used other materials in previous years. From Grade Two the new materials start with a full review of the previous year's learning, so children can catch-up on skills they might not already have learned[2]. From Grade Four, however, the impact of new materials would be more difficult to assess reliably since by that time children's skill levels would depend more upon the cumulative skills they have developed in previous years. This will be particularly true for the language materials since they have considerably less overlap with existing materials than do math materials. Consequently, it is better if pilot-testing is confined to the first three grades. The assumption is that skills developed in these early years are fundamental to learning in the later years.

If math and language materials are ready for pilot-testing, they should both be introduced at the same time to simulate real-life situations. The similarity of format in both subjects' lesson plans means "orientation" will be much the same. If language materials are not ready, math may be introduced first, with language materials introduced as soon as convenient. In Grade One early language units (which are simple reading readiness practices) may be readied in advance of the complete set of language materials. In higher grades, the review lessons for language may also be readied in draft form to start the piloting. In other words, language materials should be readied in batches if possible to accelerate the pilot-testing.

Thus there may be three potential pilot testing scenarios:

1. **Grade One**: Teachers use new math materials and batches of new language materials as they become available.
2. **Grades Two and Three**: Teachers use new math materials, and language materials as they become available. The students spend as much time as needed on the review sections in the beginning of the book to cover the previous year's work.
3. **Multi-grade classes:** Teachers use new math materials for students of different grade levels making sure that advanced students complete the review in the beginning of books. Older students would use self-instruction or peer teaching methods as much as possible so teachers can concentrate more attention on Grade One. The same technique can be used with language materials as they become available, except that teachers will need to confirm which grade level book students should be using.

Tests and testing: Testing will need to be conducted every four to six weeks in the beginning. The test items should be based on the competencies covered during the intervening weeks in which the materials have been used. As long as the test items conform to the same competencies, they can differ for different classes, and indeed some difference may be desirable to ensure that they are not known to teachers before the test. The facilitators who provide orientation should conduct the testing. They will also need to collect information about the teacher and other relevant conditions that may be affecting the results. Teachers should be interviewed about the materials--whether they are easy to use, whether their content is at the right level for children, and whether children find them interesting.

A system for reflection and improvement. Facilitators need to convene after the first testing to discuss their results. If there are difficulties with the materials they should analyse the source of the problem, and suggest what action might be taken to remedy the situation. If the problem is not in the materials themselves, and is something that can be easily addressed, remedial actions should be taken to see if results can be improved in the next round of testing. At issue is what is the minimum support necessary to produce the desired results. As noted earlier, most aspects of the programme's approach have been tested in other environments and consequently the pilot-testing aims at making sure it works in the Afghan context. Consequently while the materials are not expected to need much modification, the support structures may need refinement.

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[2]One research question might ask if this review in Grades Two and Three is adequate for students to achieve at the same level after one year study compared to two years study with the new materials. This study however would take two academic years and maybe too long for pilot-testing.

2. Finalising the materials and support systems based on field information

At the end of the pilot-testing period, the developers and designers who prepared the materials and support activities, along with field managers and technical specialists, will need to reflect on the testing results to decide whether programme components have successfully produced basic competency learning results, or whether modifications in instructional materials or support systems are needed. They also should finalise procedures for providing support, and address any other weaknesses that become apparent. This group should especially keep in mind the cost-effectiveness of elements they recommend. The aim is to produce a quality, easy-to-deliver programme at the lowest possible cost. Every additional input recommended should make a significant impact on results.

They may also suggest a number of long-term support activities to expand and maintain the programme. For example, it is likely to be useful to set up a bank of test items based on the competencies. The bank would consist of sets of alternative questions that can be used to assess the effectiveness of various parts of the programme. This assessment tool can be used to:

- determine the capabilities of teacher candidates before they are appointed
- identify weaknesses in teacher subject-content knowledge and to know where to strengthen them
- determine grade levels for which teachers have the academic capabilities
- assess programme effectiveness through student learning
- allocate resources more efficiently toward strengthening programme weaknesses
- credentialise and/or promote students who evidence mastery of grade level competencies
- identify remediation requirements

3. Final publication of the materials

When the tested materials are ready for wider distribution they will need to be produced in final version. Again cost becomes an issue. The materials for students are likely to take the form of workbooks that are used only once. They should therefore be produced in inexpensive versions that can serve this one time use economically. Except in Grade One where learning "colour" is a competency requiring coloured text, the books can be black and white. The materials should be provided free by sponsoring agencies during the testing phase and until they are well-established[3], after which time they should be bought by parents through private vendors. For this reason it is more important that they be inexpensive than "attractive." They should also avoid "objectionable" material (representation of animate objects, i.e. people or animals) to reduce the chances of being condemned by the current authorities. Teachers' guides should be produced in more durable materials, as should Basic Competencies, both of which may be used as reference sources over a period of years, and can be used even when student texts are not available.

B. Incorporating the new materials into existing programmes

Rationale. Many of the current programmes are producing poor learning results. An assessment of existing programmes showed for example that on average students were only answering about half the questions correctly on a grade-level test of math competencies, and that was true regardless of the various teaching materials used. This poor performance is a consequence of several factors. Among them are low, and often poorly defined, expectations for student learning, instructional materials with gaps in skill or concept content, poorly constructed developmental approaches to learning, weak teacher understanding of the subject concepts, and an absence of remedial programmes and/or knowledge of what needs remediation. Overall the problem has been aggravated by a lack of appropriate learning standards/measures, data to identify difficulties, and systems to correct the weaknesses. The new programme will make it possible to close these gaps.

[3]Agencies may also want to subsidise their costs after this period for especially disadvantaged groups.



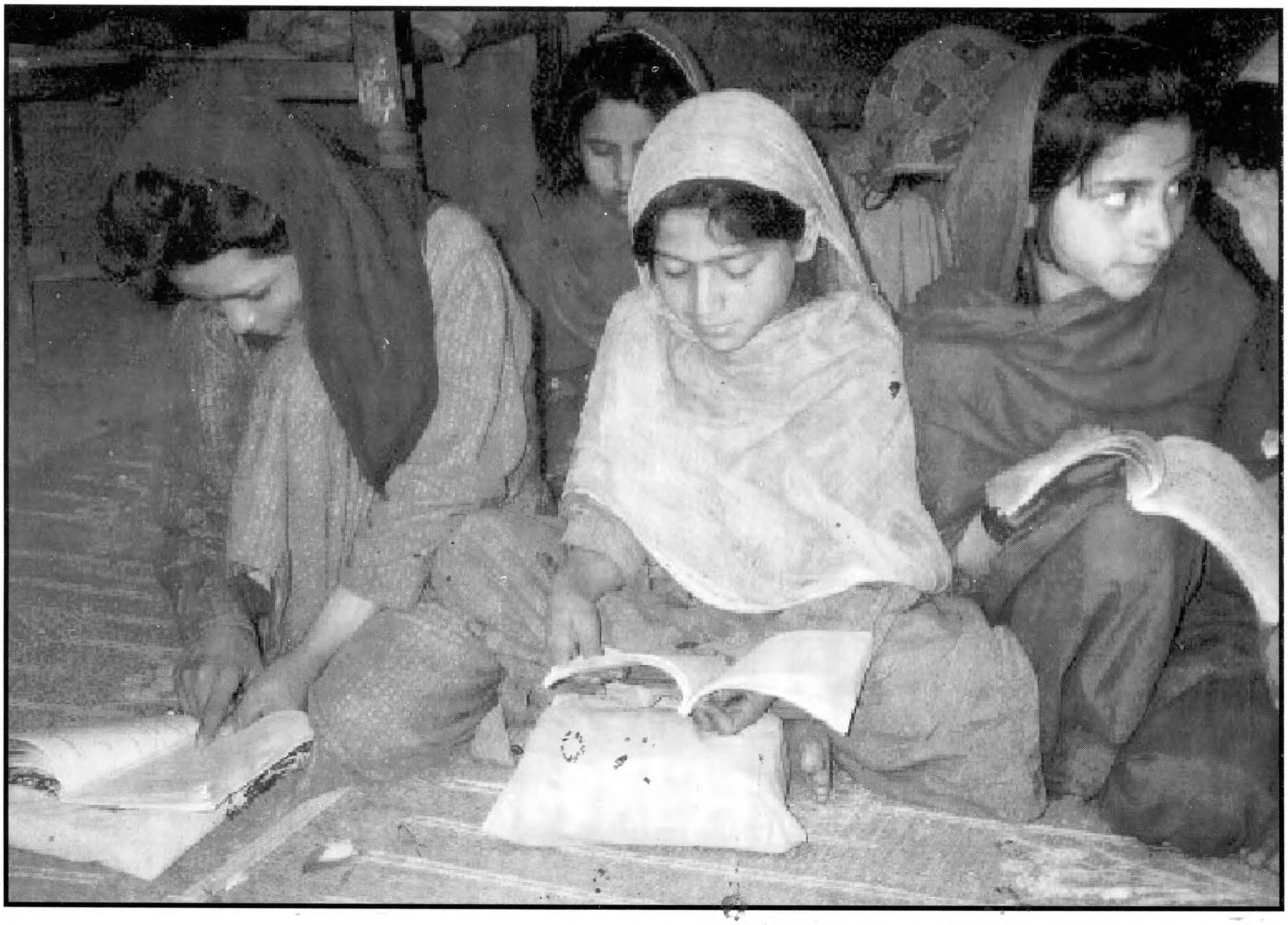
STRATEGY FOR AFGHAN PRIMARY EDUCATION SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS - FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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December 2000

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary

This paper refines the objectives of the 1998 Strategy for Afghan Education and suggests practical steps to achieve its objectives. The Strategy was formulated at the request of the assistance community and after intensive consultations with representatives of organisations involved in Afghan education. It suggested initiatives to address three pressing technical needs of Afghan education:

- the need to expand **access** to education opportunities;
- to improve programme **quality**, and
- to increase local **capacity** to develop and maintain cost-effective education programmes.

The Strategy also conformed with conditions set by the international assistance community to take a principled approach by providing opportunities equitably, to allow for common programming of education initiatives, and to provide sound investment potential both in the short and long term.

The core initiative of the Strategy was the development and delivery of a simple, **transportable quality programme** for primary education, requiring minimal support, and based on a set of agreed-upon basic competencies for the primary grades. These competencies have now been developed along with self-evident instructional materials and guides to support teachers in achieving the competency objectives. The competencies provide a uniform standard against which the learning results of a dispersed student population can be measured. Progress has also been made in incorporating the aims and the activities of the Strategy into the institutional plans and arrangements of key assistance organisations, in utilising the Basic Competencies to improve quality in existing programmes, and in building the capacity of the assistance community to develop and sustain a quality programme.

By the end of 2000 the transportable programme will be ready for testing and ultimately for delivery. The central activities crucial to future implementation of the Strategy include:

- finalising the "transportable" programme,
- continuing to incorporate the new components into ongoing programmes to improve their quality,
- building mechanisms to establish and sustain new programmes for Afghans inside Afghanistan and elsewhere,
- continuing to build local and international capacity to support a programme of education for Afghans, and
- developing additional materials and programmes to meet the further needs of Afghan children.

The present document describes these activities in detail.

During the first phase of implementation, experience showed the willingness of organisations to co-ordinate their efforts in developing the core educational components, and in utilising the Basic Competencies to improve their own programme quality. Experience also identified areas requiring further strengthening:

- a need to redouble efforts to keep Afghans at the forefront of every aspect of the initiatives both for reasons of ownership and sustainability
- the importance of communicating the aims of the Strategy to a broad audience of donors and relevant stakeholders, and
- the need for more attention to the consultative relations among key agencies.